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A blog fan views the site "du jour," by Granite State photographer Ron Cillizza, dedicated to bringing his photographs to Web browsers. Each day Cillizza publishes a new shot. He is among a growing group of bloggers in this area and beyond providing original, unedited material online. (Photo illustration by Mike Ross/Chief photographer)

Blog on

By SEAN MURPHY

Staff Writer

Bruce Allen is a computer techie who wanted to be a sportswriter.

He hung onto his dream, and envied the careers of writers like Bill Griffith of the Boston Globe and Jim Baker of the Boston Herald, who regularly write about sports journalists and commentators.

But Allen, of Epping, having no journalism experience himself, was not able to join the ranks of those in the newspaper business, so he turned to blogging.

And with that, Allen joined a widespread trend on the Internet, attracting everyone from businessmen to computer enthusiasts to political pundits to artists.

Blogs, short for "Weblogs" or "Binary logs," are Web sites dedicated to a particular subject or idea, centering around a small or specialized group of people; often, blogs are run by or are about just one person.

Allen's blog, which he runs himself and calls Boston Sports Media Watch (www.bostonsportsmedia.com), has become a forum for Allen to live his dream, offering daily commentary on sports news out of Boston and the people who cover it.

"I figured I needed to get experience, and to practice and put together a body of work. I had heard of blogging, and it seemed the perfect medium for me to

practice what I wanted to do ..." Allen said via e-mail recently.

He started in April 2002, expecting no one to read his site. In fact, he wound up averaging hundreds of "hits," or visits to his site per day, after only a few weeks.

Many visits, he said, are from the very sports journalists he writes about. Many of the sportswriters, he said, write to make sure he put links on his site to their articles and columns.

In many ways, Allen's work embodies one of the major parts of the spirit of blogging.

"It makes it very, very easy for an individual to publish something to a wide audience," said John Palfrey, a professor of Internet law at Harvard University and the director of the school's Berkman Center for Law and Society.

It is unclear just when blogs first emerged, or even exactly how many are out there now. Palfrey said the center just started following and studying them officially about a year ago.

There is also no hard-and-fast definition of a blog. From a technical standpoint, they are just Web sites, which can be as expensive or cheap, and as simple or complicated as the blogger wants them to be.

What distinguishes blogs from other Web sites is the material presented on them, and even there the rules for what makes up a blog are not set in stone. As with many trends, Palfrey said, the criteria are flexible, defined by their fans and developed gradually over time.

There are a few generally accepted guidelines. Most blogs, Palfrey said, contain unedited content. This preserves the purity of hearing the presenter's actual voice and, he said, keeps the content "edgy."

Another common feature is linking. Many blogs, Palfrey said, have links embedded in the text to other sources of information — newspapers, Web sites and even other blogs — sharing the blog's theme.

"What makes them distinctive is they sew together communities of interest," Palfrey said.

From there, though, the content and the way it is presented varies with the minds of the individual blog managers, otherwise known as "bloggers."

Palfrey said many bloggers choose to adopt the practice of adding regular, dated updates to their blogs, and many blogs feature news updates and "Dear Diary"-esque entries.

But blogs can go way beyond that. An informal survey of blogs created by local users shows sites dedicated to poetry, political opinion and popular culture.

Locally, in addition to Allen's sports site, there's www.egological.net, which features the poetry of a Dover man known only as "Bitter Joe." There's "Pam's Blog of Random Stuff," at bogaht.blogspot.com, a site where a Dover woman talks about herself, offers tidbits from the news, and other fun, slice-of-life content.

And they don't have to be just text.

A Granite-State blog called Du Jour, at www.seventythree.com/dujour.htm, has very little text; the blog is dominated by photography taken throughout the state, including the Lakes Region and the Seacoast.

Squarecatcomics.com, a blog maintained by a cartoonist in Somersworth, shows updated versions of her comic strip about, oddly enough, a cat with a square-shaped head.

They are not just for local unknowns, either. Former Vermont governor and Democratic presidential front-runner Howard Dean literally built a campaign out of thin air through one. Fellow candidate and retired Gen. Wesley Clark met in an online chatroom just last Wednesday with a number of leading political bloggers. Actor Wil Wheaton, humorist Dave Barry and former MTV veejay Adam Curry all have them.

And Palfrey said some blogs are known to carry streaming audio, video and other advanced media already common to many Web sites.

So far Allen hasn't gone that route, but he doesn't need to. Today, his popularity has surged. He has had over 1.1 million hits since he started, and said he gets about 15,000 hits a day, from all over the world. He also has another blog on the Boston Celtics he now runs for Fox Sports New England.

Allen still works for a Seacoast-area software company doing tech support, but now makes a "modest supplemental income" from ads he runs on his site.

"I did not expect anyone to really be reading," he said.

Staff Writer Sean Murphy has no blog, but can be reached by phone at 742-4455, ext. 5395, or by e-mail at smurphy@fosters.com.